



Landscape designers create
an updated formal garden and landscape
for a nineteenth-century home

FORMAL *but not fussy*

A stately stone urn sits at the center of a knot garden. Ron Cording says it's aged to perfection in moss and lichen. It's the focal point of the garden and, with its plantings, provides a pop of color.



Cording Landscape Design faced twin challenges —

aesthetic and functional — when it was called on to design a landscape scheme for a nineteenth-century home located on a sloped property in Glen Ridge.

The current homeowners had always admired the historic 1885 house, built in Shingle style with formal Colonial Revival elements. Not the least of its attractions were two porches bordered by railings of an intricate geometric design. Located on the first and second floors, the porches afford beautiful views of the New York City skyline.

The interior of the well-built home, with virtually all of its original woodwork and plasterwork in good condition, needed a mainly cosmetic renovation, the homeowners say.

The exterior was a different story. The landscaping of the sloped and overgrown half-acre property was their biggest focus. “We wanted to honor the house’s past yet reinterpret the landscape in a contemporary way that fit with our lifestyle and gave the property a look that was not too fussy,” the homeowner says.

A white picket fence borders a Charleston-style knot garden at the side of the home, which fronts the street. The fence leads to a gate that takes visitors to the front of the home. The detailing on the gate ties in with the design of the railings on the historic home’s two porches.



THE CHALLENGES

Among the practical challenges in creating a landscape design was the nature of the property, says Ron Cording, president of Cording Landscape Design in Towaco. For one thing: a 15-foot change in grade from the street to the rear property line.

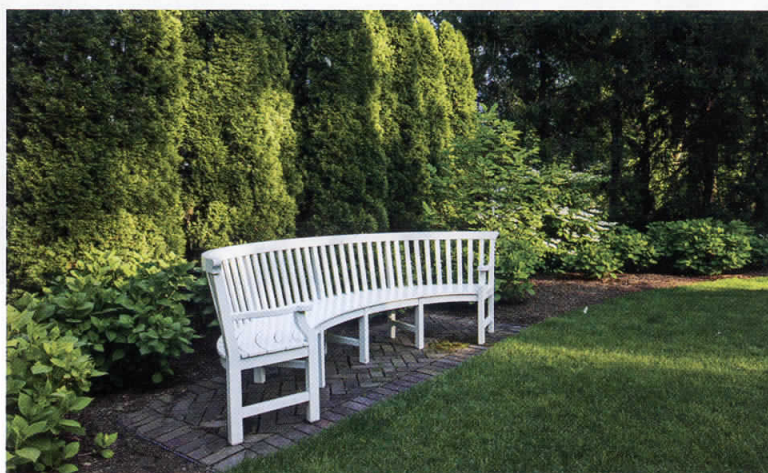
In addition, the side of the house—rather than the front—faces the street. When the house was built there was nothing else around it, Cording and project manager Dan Chomuk say. Cording speculates the home initially might have faced an old road



A brick-and-bluestone terrace acts as an entry terrace or outdoor foyer at the front of the home. "It creates a sense of arrival," Cording says.



Top: Ron Cording, collaborating with landscape architect Jeffrey Charlesworth, designed a boxwood knot garden at the street-side of the nineteenth-century house. The knot garden is composed of four squares bordered by dwarf boxwoods. Each square is planted three times a year with perennials.



Center: This lovely curved bench sits at the edge of the oval lawn opposite the steps down to the lawn. At its back are a series of arborvitae hedges that provide a screen from a neighboring home.



Bottom: A green bench provides another opportunity to sit and take in the landscape. It's located at the side of the entrance gate outside the knot garden.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Top: Stone stairs lead from the house to one of the outdoor rooms Ron Cording and Jeffrey Charlesworth designed.

Above: The home, once owned by the late Louis Fairchild, chairman of Fairchild Publications, is on a steeply sloping property, as seen on the right side of this vintage photo.

that was eliminated when the area was developed, while Chomuk thinks the house might have been situated to capture those stunning views of New York.

At any rate, the home's orientation wound up playing a big part in the landscape design Cording devised in collaboration with landscape architect Jeffrey Charlesworth of Ringoes-based Quercus Studio. The pair sought a way to lead visitors to the front door as well as a way to create a beautiful view from the street.

A white picket fence now guides visitors to a white gate, whose design echoes the detailing of the porch railings. The picket fence borders a boxwood knot garden on the side of the home, which actually fronts the street.



A stone urn graces the corner of the landing leading down to the oval lawn and garden. It's planted with different material at different times of the year. When this photo was taken in May, it featured Exbury azalea and sedum.

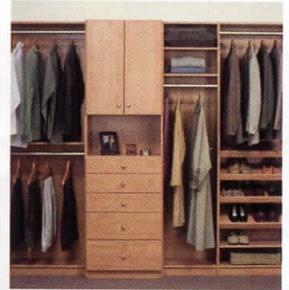
A CHARLESTON-STYLE GARDEN

Cording and Charlesworth took their cue from the homeowner, who pointed out several images of knot gardens in books. They say the garden has a turn-of-the-century feel and evokes the gardens of Charleston, South Carolina, with their neat, formal look and use of hedge material.

Historically a "knot" garden bears a formal design that employs a square frame and features aromatic plants and herbs. Most knot gardens now have edges made of boxwood. Charlesworth says he and Cording's garden might also be called a "parterre" garden, a formal garden consisting of planting

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beds laid out in a symmetrical pattern.

This garden is composed of four squares of dwarf boxwood and planted three times a year with shade-tolerant plants such as lady's-mantle and leadwort, Chomuk says.

"The boxwoods are green year-round; it's a wonderful piece of green architecture," Charlesworth says. "The garden looks beautiful even when there are no flowers. It doesn't have to be loud and boisterous; it's quietly elegant."

CHANGING GRADES

From the property's entry gate, a brick walk leads to a bluestone-bordered brick landing at the front of the house. Charlesworth describes it as an "outdoor foyer," while Cording calls it a kind of "entry terrace" to the home that "creates a sense of arrival."

Cording, in fact, terraced the property to deal with the change in grade, creating several flat spaces for walkways throughout the property and for another landing leading to steps to a lower garden and lawn area.

"To soften the grade change we created a midlevel terrace," Cording says. That terrace, like the one at the front of the house, is brick and bluestone. From it, stone steps lead down to an oval-shaped lawn and garden.

Before the landscaping project, the lawn was a sloping area overgrown with large hemlocks, Cording says. With completion of the project, it's another of the "outdoor rooms," along with the knot garden, created on the grounds, Charlesworth says.

"When you are upstairs, you don't know it's down there," he says. "It's a fun thing to come across it. It just unfolds." **DN**

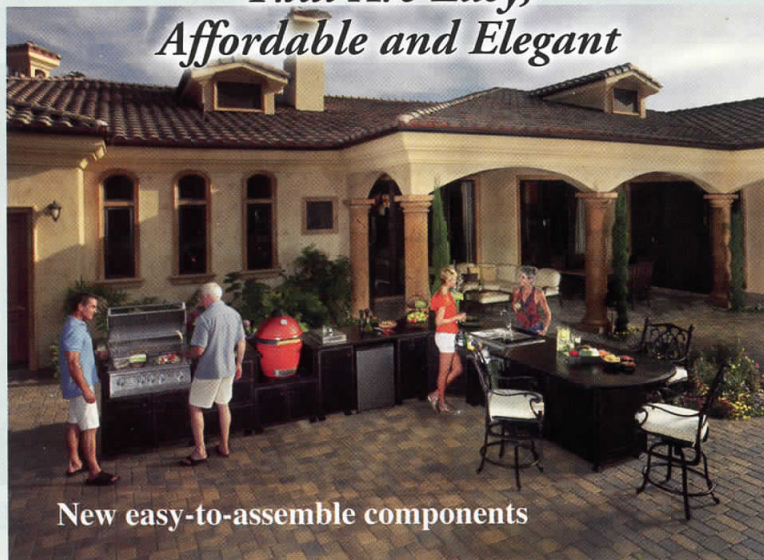
Robin Amster is a Madison-based writer and editor.

SOURCES landscape design, Cording Landscape Design in Towaco/Quercus Studio in Ringoes; landscape installation, Cording Landscape Design; stone urn in knot garden, Haddonstone in Pueblo, Colorado; benches, Weatherend Furniture in Rockland, Maine.

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